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UNCLAS TEL AVIV 000078

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

SECDEF WASHDC FOR USDP/ASD-PA/ASD-ISA
HQ USAF FOR XXXX
DA WASHDC FOR SASA
JOINT STAFF WASHDC FOR PA
CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR
COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD
COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

JERUSALEM ALSO ICD
LONDON ALSO FOR HKANONA AND POL
PARIS ALSO FOR POL
ROME FOR MFO

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E.O. 12958: N/A
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SUBJECT: SPECIAL ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

President Bush to Israel, West Bank, January 9-11, 2008

Key stories in the media:

All major media bannered President Bush's arrival in Israel late this morning to be greeted by President Shimon Peres, PM Ehud Olmert, and other dignitaries. He will be received at President Peres's residence in the afternoon. The media reported that his

visit will include Jerusalem and the Sea of Galilee.

Yediot Aharonot led with moving welcome greetings in English for the President (with a Hebrew translation inside the newspaper) by veteran journalist Eytan Haber, who was a confidant of the late PM Yitzhak Rabin.

Ha'aretz bannered: "Bush in Israel in Bid to Boost Talks." Like other dailies, the newspaper reported that the President will also discuss Iran.

Maariv headlined: "President Bush Arrives Today in Israel Empty-Handed." The newspaper clarified that the President will leave Israel with the Winograd Report and promises of a diplomatic agreement.

The Jerusalem Post's banner: "As Bush Flies In, Crisis Looms over Settlements." Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice was quoted as saying in an interview with the newspaper that the U.S. is completely opposed to construction in the East Jerusalem neighborhood of Har Homa. The media reported that a right-wing rally, organized by the banned group Kach, took place in Har Homa last night, during which demonstrators trampled pictures of President Bush, PM Olmert, and PA President Mahmoud Abbas. The Jerusalem Post reported that the police arrested far-right activists responsible for the inciting posters, and that a court released them, citing freedom of speech. On Wednesday morning police prevented hundreds of rabbis and supporters from entering the Temple Mount to demonstrate. In the afternoon another demonstration included a human chain around the Old City of Jerusalem and a rally at the Western Wall. Leading media reported that overnight right-wing activists set up two new settler outposts -- one in Efrat (Gush Etzion) in the southern West Bank, and the other near Ramallah.

The media reported that on Tuesday PM Olmert and PA President Abbas agreed to continue talks on the core issues. The media reported that although Strategic Affairs Minister Avigdor Lieberman will not quit the government coalition during the President's visit, he is maintaining his threat to do so. Lieberman was quoted as saying that he will receive clarifications from PM Olmert next week.

Ha'aretz reported that the IDF's Civil Administration in the territories recently instituted a rapid evacuation process for illegal West Bank outposts.

The Jerusalem Post and Ha'aretz (English Ed.) printed various letters by right-wing groups expressing their views to President Bush in the form of paid ads.

Major media reported that Hamas has added jailed Fatah/Tanzim leader Marwan Barghouti to the list of people it wants released in exchange for kidnapped Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit. Some media quoted the London-based Al-Hayat as saying that Israel has agreed to such a move. Israel Radio and other media cited denials by Israeli officials.

Leading media reported that Palestinians opened fire on an Israel Navy ship off the coast of Rafah on Tuesday, causing no injuries or damage. Sailors returned fire and IAF helicopters launched an air raid on the sources of the gunfire. Ha'aretz quoted the IDF as saying it was investigating a Palestinian report that an IAF rocket hit Egypt, and that the ship was involved in routine efforts to prevent weapons from being smuggled from Egypt into the Gaza Strip. Israel Radio reported that this morning four Qassam rockets were launched from the Gaza Strip into the western Negev. The radio quoted Palestinian sources as saying that the IDF attacked alleged Qassam rocket launchers from the air, killing one and wounding six others.

The Jerusalem Post reported that an Al-Qaida-linked group is believed to be behind the Katyusha fire at the western Galilee on Shlomi. The media quoted Israeli military officials as saying that Israel will not inflame the northern border on the eve of the President's visit.

Yediot reported that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is joining Egypt in the fight against smuggling from Gaza, and that it will

send an officer to Israel in the next few days for coordination talks with the IDF's Southern Command.

The Jerusalem Post reported that on Tuesday the PA rejected the idea of deploying third-party troops in the West Bank.

The Jerusalem Post reported that President Bush is expediting plans for an arms deal that would give Saudi Arabia "smart bombs." The newspaper reported that Israel is seeking a more advanced version of JDAM technology to maintain its qualitative edge.

Ha'aretz reported that a bill that would require any future territorial withdrawals to be approved by a referendum suffered a serious setback on Tuesday, when the Knesset's legal advisor told a Knesset committee that it was unconstitutional.

Yediot reported that in 2007, purchase requests by Israeli Jews for homes in the Galilee and the Negev greatly dwindled. The newspaper wryly commented: "Another step toward a Tel Aviv state."

Maariv reported that CBS-TV has named Israel's Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi Yona Metzger one of the 12 most influential religious leaders in the world.

Makor Rishon-Hatzofe said that the American presidential candidates are saying that they will remove themselves from Bush's legacy.

The Jerusalem Post reported that on Tuesday Israeli spy Jonathan Pollard expressed outrage at the invitation that Pensioners Affairs Minister Rafi Eitan received to attend a dinner with President Bush and PM Olmert on Thursday night. Eitan served as Pollard's handler when he spied for Israel in the U.S. Despite promises from Eitan to help him if he were caught, Pollard never received help from him, and he has been incarcerated in an American prison for some 23 years.

Maariv reported that Saudi Prince Al-Walid Ben-Talal earns revenues from Israeli cellular phone subscribers who use Arabic music channels.

President Bush to Israel, West Bank, January 9-11, 2008:

Summary:

Eytan Haber, veteran op-ed writer and assistant to the late prime minister Yitzhak Rabin, addressed President Bush in a page one editorial of the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "You, George W. Bush, shall be perpetuated in our history uniquely as one of the Righteous of the Nations -- those who helped us in times of distress."

The independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized: "Bush's visit to Israel and Olmert's talks with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas are meaningless as long as the facts on the ground -- the outposts that keep expanding -- clearly show just how unserious the Israeli government's declarations are, and to what extent the U.S. administration is collaborating with it."

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: "If Bush can [tell Europe in 2008 that the success of Annapolis ... (and in Iraq, Afghanistan, Lebanon and elsewhere) depends on stopping Iran], his legacy can be saved and the tables turned back toward the side of a freer and safer world."

Meretz-Yahad Party Chairman Yossi Beilin wrote in Ha'aretz: "A visit in and of itself will not do the trick. Moving the parties toward an agreement within the coming year requires the presence of a permanently based and accessible apparatus that will engage in hands-on diplomacy."

Liberal columnist Ofer Shelach wrote on page one of the popular, pluralist Maariv: "[President Bush will] come here and shake hands and pinch the cheek of a child holding a flag, and then go back home to cold places with presidential names like the Oval Office, and leave us behind, to continue bleeding."

The nationalist Makor Rishon-Hatzofe editorialized: "There is neither American pressure on Israel during this visit -- nor sensational promises. No stick and no carrot. Thus, it is all the more difficult to comprehend the fact that, in order to please its guest, the Olmert government has imposed on the Judea and Samaria [i.e. West Bank] settlements a cruel freeze."

Block Quotes:

I. "Welcome, Mr. President"

Eytan Haber, veteran op-ed writer and assistant to the late prime minister Yitzhak Rabin, addressed President Bush in a page one editorial of the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (1/9): "The State of Israel greets you today with gratitude. Two thousand years of exile and persecution have honed our ability to distinguish between friend and foe, between well wishers and evil thinkers, and you, George W. Bush, shall be perpetuated in our history uniquely as one of the Righteous of the Nations -- those who helped us in times of distress.... The partnership and friendship of your country are essential cornerstones on which the State of Israel depends. For us, America is first among our true friends -- and you, Mr. President, are first and foremost of them, even if we differ. The State of Israel thanks you today, and through you we send our gratitude to the hundreds of millions of citizens of your country, whose support we cherish. Come in peace, leave in peace, bring us peace. God bless America."

II. "Bush, Accessory After the Facts"

The independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized (1/9): "The Israelis think they are fooling the world, but they are only fooling themselves. The outposts are the essence of the Israeli bluff.... The United States is not seriously demanding that the outposts be taken down -- because if it ever had made such a demand unequivocally, the outposts would have been eliminated long ago.... Bush's visit to Israel and Olmert's talks with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas are meaningless as long as the facts on the ground -- the outposts that keep expanding -- clearly show just how unserious the Israeli government's declarations are, and to what extent the U.S. administration is collaborating with it."

III. "To Save His Legacy"

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (1/9): "Israelis will welcome U.S. President George Bush today with the sincere warmth due a great friend of this nation.... At the same time, this visit is overshadowed by undeniable tinges of sadness, desperation and even a feeling of betrayal.... The most important thing Bush can do now is show that he understands [that if the Iranian bomb keeps moving ahead, the moderates will sputter] by telling Europe that the success of Annapolis (and in Iraq, Afghanistan, Lebanon and elsewhere) depends on stopping Iran, with the goal of convincing Europe to match the sanctions the U.S. has already imposed. If Bush can do this in 2008, his legacy can be saved and the tables turned back toward the side of a freer and safer world. If he cannot, whatever has been painfully accomplished in recent months -- and indeed in the last seven years -- will

progressively unravel, leaving the next U.S. president to cope with a deteriorating world."

IV. "President in a Bubble"

Liberal columnist Ofer Shelach wrote on page one of the popular, pluralist Maariv (1/9): "It is unlikely that George W. Bush knows it, and it's unlikely that he would care if he knew: in honor of his visit, as on every holiday in Israel or when the level of alert goes up, a closure was imposed on the territories. This has become an automatic step, a security measure meant to prevent a terror attack that somebody would no doubt be happy to commit in honor of the visit of the U.S. President. For this, not even a warning is necessary. For the average Palestinian, this is another symptom that no amount of experience will diminish its humiliation and suffering, of the ongoing occupation, while presidents come and go. And Bush? He, as said, doesn't even know.... Bush will come, Bush

will go. The spin masters tell us that the visit is meant to help the survival attempts of his friend Ehud Olmert. If that's the case, it's a waste of his time. Apparently he hasn't been told about the non-existent rating of the Annapolis show.... We too relate to the American President, known as the 'most powerful man in the world,' like another passing image in the almost entertaining march of visitors for a moment, who come here and shake hands and pinch the cheek of a child holding a flag, and then go back home to cold places with presidential names like the Oval Office, and leave us behind, to continue bleeding."

IV. "An American Headquarters for Peace"

Meretz-Yahad Party Chairman Yossi Beilin wrote in Ha'aretz (1/9): "Seven years after taking office, U.S. President George W. Bush is making his first visit to Israel and the Palestinian Authority. But if he does not bring with him a serious plan for concluding a full peace agreement by the end of his term next year, he might as well stay home. The urgency cannot be overstated. Bush knows full well that if a peace agreement is not achieved in 2008, it won't be done in 2009 and perhaps for a very long time afterward. This is because of the political timetable in both the Palestinian Authority and the U.S.... A visit in and of itself will not do the trick. Moving the parties toward an agreement within the coming year requires the presence of a permanently based and accessible apparatus that will engage in hands-on diplomacy, set timetables for achieving the goals set by Bush and try to ensure that the sides meet them. If Bush comes to our region with such a concrete agenda, his visit may well mark a constructive step toward peace. If, on the other hand, all he intends to do is utter his usual platitudes about the hard work that needs to be done and the courage he sees in the Israeli and Palestinian leaderships, he might as well save the American taxpayers the airfare."

VI. "A Cruel Freeze"

The nationalist Makor Rishon-Hatzofe editorialized (1/9): "America is first and foremost busy choosing its next president, and the 'vision of President Bush' is very low on its priority list. As far as Israel is concerned, there is neither American pressure on Israel during this visit nor sensational promises. No stick and no carrot. Thus, it is all the more difficult to comprehend the fact that, in order to please its guest, the Olmert government has imposed on the Judea and Samaria [i.e. West Bank] settlements a cruel freeze, unprecedented in the history of the Land of Israel [Israel including the territories]. During the White Papers period, the British Mandate did not forbid construction of homes in existing communities. Under the Turkish occupation, there was no forced interdiction to build classrooms for children or to move barracks around."

JONES